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Before the establishment of peace by European authority, however, cattle were commonly herded by young men, armed, and only the calves were entrusted to boys, who herded them near the homesteads; therefore moving to a boys' village did not coincide with the change of occupation. Even to-day it is not uncommon for some boys who have reached puberty to be found herding cattle. One we knew herded his father's cattle although he had reached puberty, because he had no younger brothers old enough to take over, and there were only five or six boys in his herd-group altogether. There are also cases where special circumstances put the age of moving later. In one age-village the boys leave home a little later than usual because there are leopards about and it is dangerous for small boys to walk from the village of their fathers to that of the boys, after dark.

When a number of the sons of a village of married men have reached the right age, their fathers give them a piece of land to one side of the parent village on which to build. There they build little huts of reeds for themselves, sufficiently well thatched to keep out the heavy rain, and there they sleep (*vide* Plate II). The building of the huts on this land begins in a playful manner, before the boys move. While they are still herding cows and sleeping at home they build miniature huts there in their spare time, but do not sleep in them. When they move they build slightly more substantial huts with better thatch. At the beginning, when a group of boys starts a new village, or when boys join one already formed, they do not all have huts for themselves: two or three friends share a hut. But later, as they grow older, each builds for himself.

Until he marries each boy hoes his father's fields in his father's village and eats food cooked by his own mother at his father's house, but he sleeps with his friends. Thus between the time when he leaves home and his marriage each is a member of two villages: economically he still belongs to that of his father; socially to that of his own contemporaries. Though bachelors eat at their parents' home, it is very rarely that they do not eat in the company of their own friends. A bachelor does not simply go home to eat by himself, but a group of bachelors, friends living in the same boys' village, go round together eating at the house of each one's mother in turn.

In an age-village of married men there are always several

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different herds of cattle; and it is not only those from the same group of herd-boys that set up a new village together, but all the sons of the age-village. Thus when a boy leaves the herd group he joins a larger community, including the friends of his own age who have herded cows with him, and many others as well. Every boys' village consists primarily of the sons of the member of an older village who originally gave the land for its building, but sons of other villages live there too.

The village begins with perhaps a dozen boys, and their younger brothers join them, one by one; but after some years, when the senior members of the boys' village are between sixteen and eighteen years old, the younger ones begin to be refused admittance to the village: 'they are children.' The young ones then either begin a new age-village of their own, or else join a village which has already been started by the sons of a nearby men's village a little junior to that of their own fathers. If you inquire who are the members of such and such a boys' village you are always told that they are the sons of a particular village of men, but detailed investigation reveals the presence of some sons of other men's villages as well. Brothers, half-brothers and other relatives are sometimes members of the same village, but more often not; and if they do belong to the same village that is because they are near each other in age, and were born in the same village, not because they are kinsmen.

The members of the older boys' village, which is now closed and no longer increases in numbers, begin to marry as they reach the age of about twenty-five. Getting married is often a gradual process; but it is not until he has his wife permanently with him that a young man can have fields of his own and eat the produce at his own place. The cultivation of land requires the co-operation of a man and woman, and cooking on any elaborate scale is a woman's business. As the young men marry their village expands. The site is not changed but the houses are built ever bigger and farther apart, and adjacent land is brought under cultivation. The boys' village with which we are best acquainted is in this transitional stage. It has fifty-three members altogether, the majority of whom are single; but some few are married, cultivate their own fields with their wives and eat food cooked by their wives in their own houses. Of those who are single some again are betrothed to girls who visit them from time to time, but each

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264 562 574 husband will not be angry; if he were, he would be mocked at: "Did not your father provide marriage-cattle for this woman for you that she might be the wife (*mkazi*) of us all?" Sometimes, when the woman is cooking, her husband's friends come and take food out of the pot before she has finished cooking. When she protests, saying it is not yet cooked, the men say: "It is your work to cook, ours to eat." Then when her husband comes she tells him that so and so, and so and so, have eaten the food and there is only water left in the pot. . . . But when her husband's friends begin to get married they say to their wives; "That woman is really our wife! Listen to her!" And she has honour among the other women, and when they go to fetch firewood she walks with nothing, another carries her axe and head-pad.' This account cannot be taken literally—the first wife in the village does not provide *all* the food for her husband's friends, who still eat at their mothers' homes, nor do they have any sexual rights over her though they call her 'wife', but she must serve them as far as she can.

● 571 264 578 Sometimes, we were told, men's eating groups last a lifetime, but often friends quarrel or move, and the group breaks up. 'Perhaps one eats at midday and does not summon his friend, but only calls him to the evening meal, then the other, who always calls his friend to the midday meal also, is angry, saying: "He grudges me food", and they separate. They just stop calling each other to eat. Or sometimes one tries to seduce his friend's wife, and on that account they separate.'

264 178 Eating with contemporaries is still considered right and proper by Nyakyusa men, and it is generally practised by pagans, but the old men say that youths are less ready to share food than formerly. 'This custom of eating together is dying.' Certainly in Christian villages the practice has declined markedly. Many unmarried Christians eat with their friends, but the majority of the married men eat at home alone. Out of eight married men living in Rungwe, for example, only two ate together regularly, and the most educated group, the clerks, are notorious in the district for their eating habits. 'People are much shocked at the clerks for eating food alone. They say they are proud.'

264 574 Apart from eating regularly with certain close friends, well-to-do pagan men are expected to entertain generously, inviting fellow villagers to drink beer, or to a 'dinner party'—an ample meal with delicious dishes, very carefully served—from time to

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754 cows. No, they did not take his food and mats, was he not a village headman? He moved; but, after one year only, they went to fetch him back.'

Here, in the accusation against a village headman, who, by virtue of his office has the power of defence and of bringing 'the breath' on wrong-doers, we come to the root of the ambivalence towards those accused of witchcraft. Witches are dangerous, but the very power which makes them dangerous also makes them valuable as 'defenders', for no distinction between the power of attack and defence is consistently maintained. The essential difference lies in the use of the power. Hence, Mwaisumo declared, people actually like it when a man who has admitted witchcraft builds among them. 'They say he has the power of defence, and they think that a man who has once admitted witchcraft will not throttle them.' A parallel attitude towards homicides and cattle-thieves existed in the traditional culture, when chiefs were sometimes urged to rescue a homicide from the vengeance of a dead man's kin, or a cattle-thief from enraged victims, on the grounds that one who had proved himself such a fierce warrior (by killing another) or so skilful in lifting cattle, was too useful in war to be lost to the chiefdom.

754 683 Nevertheless, if a person who has once been accused of witchcraft makes himself (or herself) unpopular again, the old case is raked up against him or her, and there are men who have been driven from one chiefdom to another, each time accused by their neighbours, and wives who have been divorced for witchcraft by one husband after another. This is the terrible fate held up before 'proud' children.

574 571 582 And what of the slur on the family when a member is convicted of witchcraft? We have seen that witchcraft is considered hereditary in all but a few exceptional cases, and the stock reaction to an accusation is: 'We are astounded! No one in *our* family has ever been convicted of witchcraft!' In practice, parents are loath to allow a son or daughter to marry into a family in which either parent has a reputation of witchcraft; two or three cases were cited in which parents had opposed a marriage for this reason (*vide* Document, p. 251). But such arguments are private within the family, and the family feared by one group of neighbours need not be considered dangerous by people from another village. Since practically every adult marries at least once, the

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objection to marrying the child of one who has been convicted is clearly not pushed to its logical conclusion. No slur is cast on any one lineage when an individual is convicted of witchcraft, for he may have inherited it from either parent, or even got it from a friend; conversely no lineage is cleared by an autopsy, for not all the children of a witch are necessarily witches. Thus a man may have a father or brother or son who is 'pure', yet be a witch himself. As we have seen, even persons belonging to the same lineage may occasionally accuse each other. Nevertheless, when an individual who is reputed to be a witch dies, the close relatives do sometimes insist on an autopsy, in order to clear the deceased of suspicion, and possibly themselves also (*vide supra*, p. 117). In one case we recorded it was a daughter who insisted on the autopsy being performed on her mother, a reputed witch. No witchcraft was found.

So far we have dealt with cases of misfortune befalling an individual, followed by action against a fellow villager who is suspected of being responsible. This type of case is far the commonest within the field of witchcraft. When a general misfortune, such as a plague or epidemic, threatens, the chiefdom acts as a whole, not the villages separately, and the ritual is directed primarily to securing the blessing of the shades. There is some suggestion of ridding the chiefdom of witchcraft at the same time, but the emphasis is on appeasing the ancestors. The traditional new year cleansing (*ukutaj' ukibweja*), now rarely performed, was also the concern of chiefdoms not separate villages, and it involved prayer to the ancestors.

5. *The age-village and the ancestors*

We have dwelt at length on witchcraft and 'the breath of men', for, in Nyakyusa belief, the defence of the village against witches and the punishment of wrong-doers by 'the breath' of their fellows is the main corporate activity of the village in the religious sphere. There are no village rituals directed to the ancestors comparable to those performed on behalf of lineages and chiefdoms. Indeed, belief in the power of shades operates only in situations where social position is determined by descent, as it is in lineages and in the succession to chiefdomship. The office of village headman is not hereditary. The son of a village headman

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tion is already as important beyond as within the village, and village control over the main cash crops has not been established, as it was over certain food crops. With increasing centralization the village headman, embodiment of the solidarity and relative autonomy of each village, is losing power to the chiefs and courts, on the one hand, and to the specialist agriculturalists, school teachers, elders, and ministers of religion on the other.

Friendships beyond the age-village are fostered by common experiences at a boarding school or a labour centre, and by common interests as members of a church or a coffee co-operative which does not necessarily include fellow villagers. And most important of all, fellow villagers are not bound to one another in resistance to external dangers as they were formerly. Lion, leopard, and buffalo still exist in the district, but we heard of no recent case of a village combining for defence against dangerous (as distinct from destructive) game: if action were necessary a European sportsman was usually glad of the chance of a bag. With the cessation of cattle-raiding and inter-village warfare, the curtailment of the right of self-help, and the development of courts with power to enforce judgement in cases involving members of different chiefdoms, dependence on fellow villagers for protection from material dangers and the responsibility of a village for the actions of its members, virtually cease. A sense of dependence upon neighbours for mystical protection lingers, but as elementary education, belief in Christian dogma, and the solidarity of Christian congregations increase, this supposed dependence upon the *amanga* or mystical power of neighbours also lessens. Many men who fear sorcery (including poisoning) do not fear witchcraft, and it is only against witches that neighbours are believed to protect one. Thus change in the form of beliefs is correlated with the development of more intense relationships beyond the village.

An age-village organization is probably dependent upon isolation in another fashion also: by their own account the Nyakyusa feeling that close association between successive generations is improper has been blunted by the example of Europeans and Swahili who do not share this feeling (*vide supra*, p. 69). The missionaries teach that avoidance between father- and daughter-in-law is unnecessary, if not in itself sinful, and the implication is that only 'superstition' maintains the taboo (*vide*

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105 is the marriage of two sisters, or of a woman and her brother's daughter, to the same man; such 'sisters' are closely identified and their children are treated almost as full siblings.

Besides being bound together by a common interest in property —the cattle of the lineage—kinsmen join in the celebration of rituals to their common ancestors; for the very fact of their kinship is held to make them mystically dependent upon one another, and more particularly on the prayers of the most senior among them. At a funeral kinsmen will gather from many of the villages of the chiefdom, and some from other chiefdoms also. The range of kinship recognized varies somewhat with status, but the effective lineage group is normally of a span of three or four generations only, including descendants of a common grandfather or great-grandfather.

105 Traditionally villages were grouped in a number of small in-
● 571 dependent chiefdoms led by hereditary chiefs. Each chiefdom contained many kinsmen, but there was no fiction of common descent of all the men of a chiefdom, or of chiefs and people. There were thus three types of social group: villages occupied by age-mates, who shared common land rights, and herded and fought together; lineages bound by common interest in inherited cattle and common rituals; and chiefdoms in which the bond was occupation of a common territory and allegiance to a common chief.

105 Relations between the three groups are epitomized in the traditional law relating to theft, adultery, murder, and witchcraft.[1] A man was a member both of a village and of a lineage and both groups were responsible for his behaviour. An adulterer or cattle-thief was speared by the injured party and his kinsmen, if they could catch him. If they could not, they might attack any member of his age-village. This commonly led to war between the villages, but short of this, the kinsmen of the dead man claimed compensation from the thief or adulterer and his kin, not from the avengers. Both lineage and age-village were therefore corporate groups, the members of which were mutually responsible for each other, and it is significant that *both* senior kinsman and village headman of the defendant were required to accompany him when the case came to court. Murder was treated as a private delict, the kinsmen of the dead attacking or claiming compensation from the murderer and his kin, but witchcraft was treated as an offence against the

[1] cf. Monica Wilson, *Good Company* (1951), p. 150.

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those of very young children. 'He goes because it is his subject who has died: he is like the senior kinsman of the whole country, he rules all.' 'If a chief omits to go to a burial people say nothing, they know that he is always going to burials and they think that perhaps he has some urgent business. But if he constantly misses burials then people say that he has no affection for his people, that he does not come to bury them as is fit; and if a chief hears them saying this then he is ashamed.' Sometimes a chief who is busy will send a son to represent him. And he sends the drums to beat the lament. 'The drum *is* the chief . . . they cannot beat the drum before the chief has spoken.'

Besides the chief, the villagers, the relatives, and the drummers, there come also personal friends of the dead man from other villages and chiefdoms. And beyond all these there often come others who are attracted not so much by grief and sympathy, nor even by the obligation to express these feelings, but rather by the dancing, the crowds and the possibility of getting some meat to eat. Not all those who come stay the whole three or four days, while the relatives who live at a distance often do not arrive until the second or third day.

The Nyakyusa believe that in order to protect the living and avenge the dead it is most important to discover the cause of death. To do this they summon a doctor to perform an autopsy,[1] an operation fearful and repugnant, but felt to be necessary. The symptoms are interpreted in terms of witchcraft or sorcery, or other supposed causes of disease.

On the first, or early on the second, day after death, the burial takes place. The grave is dug in the swept and beaten earth that immediately surrounds the huts. The first spit of earth is always turned by the eldest son of the one who has died. At one burial we saw the young eldest son of a dead man being helped to do this. He was too small to manage a hoe by himself so he caught the handle near the blade while an older relative held it behind to steady it for him. The digging after the first spit is done by a skilled grave-digger, who may be a kinsman or not, with the help of others. The grave is ten or more feet deep with a cave at the bottom to one side. Some graves are oblong, some round or oval,

[1] This is certainly traditional, cf. D. Kerr-Cross, 'Crater Lakes North of Lake Nyasa', *The Geographical Journal*, V (1895), p. 119. The custom is also reported for the Nyamwanga. For a description of the autopsy, cf. Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, pp. 247-50.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE PARTICIPANTS

(a) Categories of participants

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The people who take part in rituals have been referred to repeatedly and now it is possible to define who they are. They fall into four categories: the principals, the minor actors, the congregation, and the officiants or priests. The principals are those who undergo the full ritual lest they go mad; they are always close kin, but what category of kin depends on the type of ritual and the status of the person for whom it is performed. After a death, those who *must* perform the ritual to drive away the shade are the children and grandchildren of the deceased—all of them, the widows and the heir, if a man has died, or, if it is a woman and a senior wife, the widower and her related co-wife if she has one.[1] A man does not perform the ritual for a junior wife or one he has inherited. Children of a related co-wife are treated, for the purposes of ritual, as her own children, and all must undergo the ritual, but only some of the children of other co-wives are selected to perform it. When a man dies the children of the heir perform it, but only some of the children of his other brothers and half-brothers. 'We choose some and leave the others until their own father dies.' The genealogy given on p. 273 to show who performed the ritual on a particular occasion illustrates this. A mother (unless she has been divorced) performs the ritual for all her own children, and the children of a sister who is a co-wife. A divorced woman may come to mourn her dead child at her former husband's homestead but she takes no part in the ritual. 'I, the husband, perform the ritual alone; the woman comes to weep and returns to her new husband. I, the husband, say: "The blood is mine; that bag was bought (*alukigwa*) with cattle; she was divorced and bought with cattle again."' A man performs the ritual for a son and daughter of each wife, and grandparents perform it for some, but not all, grandchildren.

[1] Probably also the younger sister or brother's daughter who replaces her as a wife, but we have no cumulative evidence on this point.

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ritual they distinguish *abakaswa* (kinsmen) from *abanda itale* (non-relatives) or *abapakipanga* (villagers), and *abakikala* (those of the lineage of a dead man) from *abake* (affines) and mother's relatives (*abijwa*). These categories have different functions.

(*b*) *Christians*

The performance of family rituals is complicated by the fact that 16 per cent of the Nyakyusa are professing Christians, and in almost every lineage there are individuals who withdraw from the full performance of traditional rituals at death, puberty, and marriage, birth, and misfortune. In most cases such a withdrawal is treated tolerantly by the pagan kinsmen: the Christian kinsmen come to mourn, to congratulate the bride, to express sympathy with the parents of twins; and their non-participation in the washing and shaving and avoidance of ritual meat and beer is accepted. At the funeral of Mwamulenga his preceding full brother, who should have been a principal in the death ritual, was a Christian, and he took no part, though his children went through it. At the funeral of Mwampiki (p. 148) one boy was left untreated on the ground that he was a Christian and a Christian 'should not have two gods'. At the puberty ritual of Mwaihojo's daughter (p. 91) the brother called to wash with her was influenced by Christians and was reluctant to take part, though he finally did so.

Only when a son who is heir to family wealth, or to the office of chieftainship or priesthood refuses the inheritance of widows (as a Christian must do) is there very strong pressure on him to conform to traditional custom: the union of the heir with the widows is held essential to their health. Sometimes also there is acute conflict between different members of the family over the performance of an autopsy, the pagans pressing for it and the Christians opposing it. This we saw in the death of E. when her pagan senior brother wished to examine her, and her Christian junior brother opposed him vehemently.

That Christians cannot take part in certain of the rituals[1] and do not suffer if they omit them is generally accepted. The farewell to the dead at the homestead of the deceased, and the treatment of kinsmen of twins, fall into this category. About certain other rituals, such as the ritual of the gasping cough and the protection against sorcery, opinions are divided. Some of our Christian friends insisted that 'the gasping cough is a real illness' and cited

[1] There are minor differences in the rules of the different missions.